



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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RESEARCHERS CAPTURE FOURTH LARGEST ENDANGERED COLORADO PIKEMINNOW IN SAN JUAN RIVER SINCE 1991

ALBUQUERQUE, NM -- Researchers with the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program (San Juan Program) captured a 30.3-inch, 9.1-pound endangered Colorado pikeminnow this fall about 16 miles downstream of Shiprock, NM. This was the fourth largest Colorado pikeminnow captured in the San Juan River since 1991. It was estimated to be 10-15 years old. Researchers collected the fish while conducting adult fish monitoring and nonnative fish management activities as part of efforts to recover the Colorado pikeminnow and another endangered fish – the razorback sucker. The fish was tagged and returned to the river.

Only three other Colorado pikeminnow have been captured at larger sizes since the early 1990s. Those fish were all wild adult fish, collected between 1991 and 2000.

“This year’s capture was very encouraging because finding a fish of this size and age provides evidence that Colorado pikeminnow are out there and surviving,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southwest Regional Director, Benjamin Tuggle. “We have seen few Colorado pikeminnow in the San Juan River since the species became nearly extinct during the late 1990s. This fish was likely the offspring of Colorado pikeminnow that were experimentally stocked by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources in the mid-1990s in an effort to repopulate the river with this species.”

Colorado pikeminnow were once abundant in the main stem of the Colorado River and most of its major tributaries in New Mexico, Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming. Populations of Colorado pikeminnow began to decline during the 1960s. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the species as endangered in 1967 and it received full protection under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The Colorado pikeminnow is also protected under state law by the seven Colorado River Basin states.

Following Utah's experimental stocking efforts, the San Juan Program implemented a formal stocking program in 2002 to reintroduce Colorado pikeminnow in the San Juan River. At that time there were few, if any, wild adult fish remaining in the San Juan River. Since 2002, stocking of Colorado pikeminnow has continued on an annual basis. The Program is stocking 350,000 to 450,000 age-0 Colorado pikeminnow annually. As a result of these stocking efforts, numbers of Colorado pikeminnow in the San Juan River are increasing.

Larval fish caught in 2004, 2007, 2009, and 2010 indicate that these hatchery-produced fish are reproducing in the wild.

"Although capture of larval Colorado pikeminnow indicates spawning is occurring, we need the fish to grow to maturity in the river to achieve a self-sustaining population," said San Juan Program Director Dave Campbell. "In the last two years, we have started to capture some larger Colorado pikeminnow, several that are nearly 20 inches in length, and we hope this trend continues."

In 2005 a researcher caught and tagged a 24-inch Colorado pikeminnow. That same fish was caught again this year and measured 26 inches, demonstrating that not all of the larger Colorado pikeminnow from the early 1990s were lost. It takes a Colorado pikeminnow seven to 10 years to reach adulthood after being stocked into the river, indicating that this fish came from an adult that was alive in the early 1990s.

The Colorado pikeminnow is the largest minnow in North America and is an endangered, native fish of the Colorado River system (which includes the San Juan River). This species is thought to have evolved more than 3 million years ago. Called the "white salmon" by early settlers due to its migratory behavior, the Colorado pikeminnow has a torpedo-shaped body and a large, toothless mouth. It has an olive-green and gold back and a silvery-white belly.

Colorado pikeminnow can live up to 40 years and were historically known to grow to 6 feet long and weigh 80 pounds. Colorado pikeminnow are known for long-distance spawning migrations of more than 200 miles in late spring and early summer. They are capable of reproducing at 7 to 10 years of age. Young Colorado pikeminnow feed on insects and plankton, whereas adults feed on fish.

Today, two wild populations of Colorado pikeminnow are found in the Upper Colorado River Basin – one in the upper Colorado River system and one in the Green River system. The San Juan Program continues to stock Colorado pikeminnow to develop a separate, self-sustaining population. Other recovery actions include construction of fish passages and screens, coordination of instream flows, management of nonnative fishes and implementation of ongoing research and monitoring activities.

For more information, call 505-761-4712 or visit the San Juan Program's website: <http://southwest.fws.gov/sjrip>.

The San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program is a cooperative partnership of American Indian Tribes; local, state and federal agencies; water organizations; power customers and environmental groups established in 1992 to recover endangered Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker while water development proceeds in accordance with federal and state laws and interstate compacts.

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Editors:

Photo caption: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist Bobby Duran holds the fourth largest endangered Colorado pikeminnow captured in the San Juan River since 1991. The 30.3-inch, 9.1 pound fish was captured this fall about 16 miles downstream of Shiprock, NM.

(Photo courtesy San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program)

For a high resolution version of the photo, please contact Mary Nelson, 303-969-7322, ext. 225, mary_nelson@fws.gov.